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BOOK REVIEWS

IN CHARGE OF
M. E. CAMERON



THE NEW YORK PUBLIC SCHOOL: BEING A HISTORY OF FREE EDUCATION IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK. By A. Emerson Palmer, M.A. Macmillan Co.

We are constantly forgetting that this America of ours is but an infant when compared with other countries, and this is especially the case in New York City, where the weather-beaten stone, the narrow streets, the constant tearing down of what appear to be quite decently venerable buildings, all tend to delude us into the belief that the city is every bit as old as London or Paris. So this story of the "New York Public School" gives us quite a shock, introducing, as it does, the centenary of the inauguration of the movement for free public schools, February 19, 1905.

The author says that from a literary standpoint the book "makes no claim upon the reader;" perhaps not, but with the exception of most exhaustive and exhausting tables of expenditures and values, the book is full of interest from cover to cover, is intensely interesting at times, and is constantly giving glimpses of the city in the different stages of its growth and development that lead us into all sorts of pleasant by-paths. The story goes back a bit to the arrival of the first schoolmaster, one Adam Roelantsen, who landed on Manhattan Island in 1633 and became a salaried official of the West India Company. His school was free, but it did not prosper. We are told that he received but one hundred and forty-four dollars per annum, and "there is reason to believe that this pioneer in the army of school-teachers in Manhattan Island took in washing to increase his income. He was a man of quarrelsome disposition, and during his somewhat checkered career in New Amsterdam was the plaintiff or defendant in numerous lawsuits. In 1646 he was sentenced by the court to be flogged and banished forever out of the country, but this sentence was not carried out on account of his four motherless children." This reads very like the dream of a naughty school-boy thirsting for vengeance.

The beginning, establishment, and growth of the Free School Society from the year 1805 until it went out of existence in 1853, after forty-

eight years of service, are told in fourteen chapters, perhaps the most interesting in the book. One can easily believe that there were grave head-shakings over the breaking up of the old society and the inauguration of the new Board of Education. For valedictory of the former we quote an extract from the Annual Report for 1853: "Thus by voluntary surrender terminated the separate corporate existence of a society that, during nearly half a century of unremitted and unrequited philanthropic labor in the noblest of causes, imposed upon this city a debt of gratitude that can never be fitly estimated, much less repaid. During that period it has conferred the blessing of instruction on six hundred thousand children, and more than twelve hundred teachers. So long as the influence of those children and their teachers shall be felt—and when shall it cease?—so long shall the usefulness of the Public School Society continue. Its inventories, vouchers, documents and reports, and records of its routine of business have been properly deposited with the New York Historical Society, but history can never tell how much these unostentatious details have contributed to the safety, prosperity, and glory of this great metropolitan city."

The new Board of Education is still with us, and if we may judge by passing events may not even yet have reached its full growth, albeit its proportions are very grand, and very different to those of its earlier days; each year adds something to the nobility of the public school institution; now it is the vacation school, now nurses in the public school, or the wise taking of women into committees and upon the board. There are the playgrounds, the free lectures and classes—there is seemingly no end to the variety of the benefits it has brought or promises to bring.

The closing words of Mr. Seth Low's introduction make a fitting summing-up of this brief review:

"This 'Centennial History of the New York Public School' cannot fail to awaken a sense of pride in our citizens and a profound sense of gratitude towards all who have taken part in making our public-school system what it is; and especially to the great army of teachers, the dead and the living, who have wrought and are now working their lives into it year by year. The New York City of to-day is very largely their handiwork; and the New York that is to be will be more largely indebted to them than to any other single factor that will influence its history."

THE HUMAN HAIR: ITS CARE AND PRESERVATION. By I. R. Stetson, M.Sc. New York: The Maple Publishing Company.

This favorite subject for filling in the odd column in magazines and Sunday papers is here treated most completely; and if one gathers from a careful perusal of the book the somewhat discouraging fact that one